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Ethnicities in the Aftermaths of Sexualised Coercion – Common Issues and Diverse Personal Meanings

Bodil Pedersen

Introduction

In Denmark, except concerning communities that are over-generalised as 'Muslim' minorities, the notion that gender equality is already a fact is widespread. Yet statistics show that from 2000 to 2006 the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault in Copenhagen was contacted by only 27 men. In the same period, however, 1764 women contacted the Centre (Madsen/Nielsen 2006: 5). From 2000 to 2004, slightly exceeding their representation in the general population, 14% of the women were from non-western ethnic minorities (Årsrapport 2004: 10).

In this article, as its title indicates, I use the broad concept of sexualised coercion. It encompasses the psychologically not clearly distinguishable but related practices of rape, attempted rape and other forms of sexualised subjection (Sidenius/Pedersen 2004). Although not an exact reflection of the frequency of sexualised coercion, the figures above do indicate that notions of gender equality in Denmark must be questioned. Nevertheless meanings of sexualised coercion are customarily understood in traumatology terms that neutralise gender, ethnicity and culture (Elklit et al. 2003; Foa/Rothbaum 1998; Van der Kolk 1996). Consequently personal meanings of sexualised coercion are frequently conceptualised and analysed regardless of person, place and time (Marecek 1999; Pedersen 2004; Ronkainen 2001). When gender and ethnicity are included, as in national surveys and in other statistical reports (Elklit 2002; Helweg-Larsen/Kruse 2003; Helweg-Larsen/Kruse 2004), they are conceptualised as separate entities. It is a conceptualisation that does not fully grasp the intersections of their meanings with other aspects of the personal conduct of life. One reason is that personal meanings of participation in social practices are rarely researched from first-person perspectives (Danziger 1990), as it is the aim of the study of which this article is a part (Sidenius/Pedersen 2004; Pedersen 2008c).

The study draws on 40 series of consultations with women subjected to sexualised coercion, supplemented by 15 interviews. Meanings of ethnicities,

gender as well as of sexualised coercion and other life events (Clemans 2005; Salkvist/Pedersen 2008) are seen as constituted and re-constituted through processes of personal participation in the diverse contexts of everyday life (Dreier 2008). One implication is that personal and societal meanings of ethnified and gendered social relations are changed over time and place in diverse intersecting social practices. The first-person perspectives of the participants in the study are therefore discussed as having been developed in and through participation in such practices. In them, gendered and ethnified participation takes on forms that are habitual but changing.

In everyday life, ethnicities are not lived in essentially unified cultural and religious forms. There are no clear lines of demarcation between the conduct of lives of persons of diverse ethnic groups. Rather their lives are creolised (Eriksen 1994; Hannerz 1992): They are lived as socially positioned personal hybrids of perspectives and practices in dealing with intersecting aspects of life conditions. Social positions may themselves be composed of multiple, sometimes intermingled and untraceable elements in ongoing and situated 'culture'.

'Cultures' must then be understood as part of a continual historical process of change e.g. of creolisations. They *seem* unique and stable in our reifying categorisations (Baumann 1996; Hall 1992). But they, and the ways they are personally lived change as they engage in common and diverse local/societal practices. Such changes are related to forms of participation in a diversity of contexts constituted by changeable social relations and practical goals. This conceptualisation of creolisation is developed by drawing on Eriksen's and other anthropologists' discussions of the concept and related phenomena (1994), combined with a critical psychological approach to subjectivity (Dreier 2008; Holzkamp 1995; Nissen 2005). Accordingly, when analysing meanings of ethnified and gendered lives exclusively from the perspectives one ethnic group, one risks over-emphasising similarities within the group, as well as differences in comparisons with other groups (Haavind 2000).

A transversalist multi-ethnic approach

In 2001 the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault made a statistical analysis of the ethnic/national origin of the women it attended to that year. 19 out of 212 women, 9%, were first or second generation migrants from non-western countries. In comparison their overall percentage of the population of Denmark was 3.7. But the Centre exclusively receives women from the Copenhagen area. Here they constituted 6.2%. The representation of women from

non-western countries thus slightly exceeded their representation in the area (Rapport 2001: 24–25), which may be linked to their expectations of severe difficulties in talking to families and friends, expectations that may sometimes be exaggerated (Rapport 2001: 29–30).

Since research on ethnified gender has often focused on one specific minority, it has produced descriptions of what apparently constitutes the development of specific ethnified meanings (Abu-Ras 2007; Huisman 1997; Goodenow/Espin 1993; Methora 1999). It may raise our awareness of restrictions in the lives of minority women, co-determined by what is conceptualised as 'heritage', as well as of limitations imposed by social marginalisation. It may also, however, imply turning a blind eye on issues common in and across the conduct of diverse minority lives as well as majority ones.

Moreover, excluding majorities from studies implicitly constructs reductive and static dualisations of majorities versus minorities, western versus non-western, and migrants versus non-migrants (Quin 2004). The following remarks by minority women participating in this study underscore the need to overcome such dualisations. They point to the complex constellations of changing meanings of sexualised coercion in the conduct ethnified lives (Salkvist/Pedersen 2008). Zarah stated: *'It* (the meanings of revealing experienced events of sexualised coercion) *depends on how the families think, how far they have gotten with their lives….'.* Jasmin added: *'It depends on what family you come from; just because it's a foreign family, it's not just one way* […]. *Actually it is so different, even though they all have the same religion, but for example they have different traditions.'* But, the study showed that most majority women, exempting the mention of religion, would have acquiesced to such reflections. Many described their families as central to the meanings they delegated to having been subjected to sexualised coercion. Also, and in contrast to majority conceptions of the crucial meanings of religion for non-western minorities, the only woman who referred to religious practices as a specific difficulty was from the majority. While being underdetermined in studies of majorities, the meanings of ethnicities, cultures and/or religions are often over-determined in studies of minorities.

Strategies of action by majority and minority persons are answers to a multitude of similar and often contradictory processes in the *same* societies. Multiple meanings of ethnified and de-ethnified participation are situated and creolised in these processes. What may sometimes be termed (re)traditionalisation is intimately entwined with late-modern globalised conditions for the conduct of lives (Giddens 1991). Diverse processes of ethnic minorisation intersect with other forms of social and economical marginalisation. In some cases they seem to provoke diverse forms of retrenchments into 'tradition' imposed on, and/or chosen by, ethnic minority women (Goodenow/Espin

1993). But this is also the case in diverse aspects of the lives of majority women. Moreover, for minorities as well as majorities marginalisation may simultaneously enhance processes of 'modernisation'.

In fact both tendencies, and the personal ways in which they are performed, intersect with equally situated versions of other societal processes. Personal possibilities are always engendered as well as restricted by ethnicities, gender, and other relations of power. Participation is disconnected from unequivocal 'traditions', and is more or less open to negotiation (Staunæs 2005). Closing in on situated personal dilemmas without naïvely equating their situation, recent research illustrates how persons from majorities as well as minorities may face similar issues and difficulties. They may consequently develop comparable and similar strategies of action otherwise understood as specifically 'ethnic' (Staunæs 2005; Pedersen 2007).

In consideration of this I have chosen a multi-ethnic and transversalist approach to the meanings of sexualised coercion. It is one that crosses ethnic categorisations and includes gender. It explores common issues without ignoring the diverse positions of those to whom universalities supposedly apply (Yuval-Davis 1997: 125).

Critical issues and personal concerns

When personal meanings of ethnicities and gender are excluded from research, tendencies to overlook personal concerns related to critical issues connected to sexualised coercion are reinforced. As in Nina's proposition, they may be especially precarious:

> I think, to start with… you loose control during coercion. And then when you don't have control over what is going to happen, because other people are making the decisions on what is going to happen, then it feels like you don't have control over your own situation.

She highlights how crucial loss of agency is. Loss of agency, during the events and their aftermaths were equally *the* critical issue described by all women regardless of ethnicities (Salkvist/Pedersen 2008). In order to explore the meanings of loss of agency an agency-oriented research approach is needed (Dreier 2008; Quin 2004). The proposed analysis therefore focuses on *personal concerns and strategies of action*. Consequently discussions are structured around personal perspectives on crucial issues. One result of the study on which the article draws was that in its aftermaths sexualised coercion was attributed and reattributed changing meanings. Hence the following paragraphs do not focus on isolated meanings of events of sexualised coercion.

Accounts chosen

The vast majority of women who contacted the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault in the period of the study were between 15 and 25 years old (Statusrapport 2000–2004). Consequently accounts by 5 *young* minority women and 5 from the majority, were strategically selected. According to the case method, and in order to construct the foundation for a knowledge-generating analysis, the goal of selection was to create as rich a material as possible (Flyvbjerg 2001). When the number of participants is limited, a strategic selection may maximise the access to relevant information, and strengthen the analysis. Accounts of participants were therefore chosen on the basis of their informative value. They are each and together the most saturated in relation to the subject of the article. As extreme, deviant or critical cases are criteria that enable a critical questioning of dominant perspectives, they also represent a maximum of variation. Hence accounts were selected in consideration of similarities *and* diversities.

Jasmin (22), Leyla (25), Zarah (23), and Madiha (20)[1] come from diverse ethnic minorities from the Middle East. Jessica's (18) mother is from a Far Eastern country and her father from the ethnic majority. Anna (19), Catrine (18), Jennifer (17), Jette (23) and Nina (23) are from the ethnic majority. The few times these pseudonyms are not used, the quotes are chosen from the main study in order to boost discussions.

Lives of young women

The young women participating in the study were in the process of developing new strategies of action. While seeking to extend and establish new contexts of action, they sought through these to change and limit their participation in, and dependence on, those co-determined by their parents. Furthermore, the necessity of dealing in an individualised manner with changes and choices in and between diverse courses of action is generally intensified in late modernity (Giddens 1991). So when having been subjected to sexualised coercion, many of the women's reflections concerned contradictions between receiving help and support from parents, while developing or at least maintaining acquired aspects of agency. But when daughters had been subjected to sexualised coercion parents often worried more, and their attempts at control escalated.

1 Madiha was interviewed by Karin Sten Madsen (Rapport 2001: 32–33).

One young woman from the ethnic majority wanted to distance herself from her parents who tried to keep track of her whereabouts through frequent calls to her cell-phone. After the event she said: *'I feel as if I have been put in a playpen. They constantly want to know where I am'*. Fearing her parents would increase what she experienced as their 'interference', she did not want them to know how upset she actually was. Jasmin, who had been living with the perpetrator, feared him as he stalked and threatened her, and was afraid of living alone. Her parents were informed and wanted her to move back in with them. Her brother and sister also encouraged her to do so. Feeling *'claustrophobic'* at the mere thought, she adamantly refused. In addition, and like other women, she wanted to protect her parents from the possible aftermaths of the events of coercion. Then instead, and in order to avoid what she saw as their attempts at controlling her life, she shared a single room belonging to a girlfriend. After the event Catherine lived with her parents, but, against their wish, spent most of her time at her boyfriend's. Describing staying with her parents she said: *'My mum always asks me how I am. It is almost too much… My dad doesn't ask anything. He just looks worried… I don't want to talk to him about it either'*. Like many of the women, she primarily turned to peers for support. Another young woman described getting help from girlfriends as: *'Yes, the girls! We have gotten together many times, sat down, cooked a good dinner, and then things were talked about.'*

Most informants had limited experiences in dealing with crisis-like situations without the support of their parents. In the aftermaths of sexualised coercion they found developing agency a project fraught with contradictions and personal ambivalences. When they experienced anxiety and felt at risk of further events of coercion, dependency on their parents increased. Both minority and majority women frequently experienced parental involvement, in what they also referred to as their *private* lives, as potential threats to their agency. Even when having moved out of their parents' homes, their relations with them were full of dilemmas. Nina, who had been living on her own for quite a while, briefly moved back in with her parents. She said:

> For example my parents, they wanted to help. It was nice when they were at home. But they weren't supposed to talk too much about it, and they weren't supposed to sit in the same room as me, and not to look too much at me. But I did not want them to be indifferent either.

As in her statement above, loss of agency was inherent to the experience of sexualised coercion. She, like several of the women, needed support and a safe place to live. But moving back in with parents could be experienced as just another loss of agency.

Individualisation of blame and guilt

Theory frequently connects events categorised as traumatic with feelings of guilt (Herman 1992). In what may seem an illustration of this Jasmin explained:

> Yes, well it is not my responsibility *(that I was raped)*. But when it is someone that I have had a relationship with, then maybe I think the thought that: Oh no, could it be my own fault?' She added: 'Even if it isn't… then I might sit and argue with myself: Oh no, maybe I did something wrong, something or other, right?'

In most cases registered by the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault, women were acquainted with their perpetrators (Rapport 2001). Knowing the perpetrator contributed to wondering about responsibility for the event. Additionally, and pointing to the sociality of the meanings of events (Refby 2001), both majority and minority women spoke of sexualised coercion as something they may be blamed for. Jennifer (17), who was twice subjected to sexualised coercion, had been drinking. She described her parents' perspective: *'They were very angry with me and told me off, and said that surely now I would stop drinking so much. Yes… they thought it was my own fault'*. She was in despair over their attribution of guilt, and, like Jasmin, it made her worry about questions of responsibility and reflect on them.

Ascriptions of guilt sometimes contradicted what may otherwise have been considered normal and appropriate. Parents of minority women, for example, may be proud of their daughter's self-determined lives, and majority parents may accept the consumption of alcohol as an integral part of being young. But when it became associated with sexualised coercion, it was connected to notions of responsibility, if not guilt, and took the form of woman blaming (Pedersen and Stormhøj 2006; Roche and Wood 2005). Persons from the majority as well as minorities were apt to associate events of coercion with personal ways of conducting life. Especially, but not exclusively, in the case of the young majority women, an implicit late-modern individualisation of responsibility for one's life seemed connected to this. Thus Anna stated: *'I don't like telling my parents about it* (sexualised coercion). *They have taken such good care of me. It is as if I haven't taken proper care of the freedom they have given me'*. 'Woman blaming' and other individualisations like this one mask connections between victimisation and aspects of gendered conditions for lives (Ronkainen 2001; Pedersen 2009).

Reflections on agency and feelings of responsibility in the study suggested that 'feelings of guilt' are not natural, universal reactions to sexualised coercion, as assumed in much theory and 'trauma talk' (Marecek 1999; Hel-

liwell 2000). They were evidently related to blame assigned by others. Jasmin reflected in the following in a way that was reminiscent of most of the young women: *'I think it is much easier if... if I had been assaulted on the street* (instead of by someone she knew), *and then raped. Then perhaps it was not* (seen as) *my responsibility'*. She connected her remark to assumptions about responses by 'her' ethnic community. Meanwhile, and most importantly women's consequent (re)evaluations of their actions concerned personal agency. They were attempts of subjects at (re)constructing personal perspectives on agency in the aftermaths of subjection to coercion (Salkvist and Pedersen 2008).

Mainstream concepts of culture over-determine differences in ethnic minorities. Jasmin and the other minority women connected their dilemmas to their ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, taking their own perspectives for granted, majority women did not reflect on their experiences as ethnically related. But obviously reflections made by minorities as well as by majorities must be understood as ethnically/culturally informed attempts at understanding events and their aftermaths.

Sexualisation and sexuality

In late-modern Scandinavia, serial monogamy or having multiple sexual partners is widely practiced by ethnic majority youngsters (Byriel and Rasmussen 2002; Johansson 2007). While not necessarily on a basis of gender equality, sexual relations are negotiated and regulated by the participants themselves (Giddens 1995). Young women customarily view such relationships as 'natural' explorations of sexuality and social relations. In this study sexuality was generally a discussable topic in conversations with women friends. However, and despite an extensive sexualisation of the public sphere (Nordisk Ministerråd 2006), struggling with the sexualised aspect of coercion, which made it especially difficult to speak to her father, Nina said: *'It was difficult to tell my mum and dad… it is also embarrassing… We never talked about sexuality in the family'*. When associated with sexuality, sexualised coercion seemed to be a sensitive, and in some contexts, 'private' subject.

Yet Jette explained that the sexualised aspects of coercion were *not* the most difficult for her. Reminiscent of other informants, she compared the experience to waking up next to a man after a night on the town thinking: *'What am I doing here?'* She did not feel that it reflected on her reputation, nor on her experience of her sexuality. Nor did she, as it is often assumed, experience sexual problems in the aftermaths of the event (Hilden and Si-

denius 2002). But as she understood sexualised coercion as an offence against her right to self-determination, it made her very angry. Even subsequently experiencing many problems, another young woman pointed out: *'He had nothing to do with my relationship to sexuality, sensuality and that kind of thing. He was not a part of my sex life as such. So I don't think my relationship to sex has changed much.'* Similarly, Nina reflected: *'When you use the word sex you immediately think of something nice. Something two people have together. So when you use the word sex in association with the concept of rape, then it doesn't seem quite right, right?'*

Although young women from non-western countries seem to be the least sexually active youngsters in Denmark, many embrace sexual practices (Byriel and Rasmussen 2002). Jasmin told her friends that she had been subjected to sexualised coercion. But the sexualised aspect was not her main concern, being stalked and threatened by the perpetrator was. Again, the critical issues do not seem to pertain to 'sex' as much as to agency and self-determination.

Issues and dilemmas for minority women

Minority informant's lives did not correspond to Danish stereotypes. They were not married, and did not live with their parents. All had secondary educations and were employed. Yet they reported that their parents expected them to protect their virginity until marriage. But conducting their lives in creolised ways, they had sexual relationships while pretending abstinence.

In host countries minorities' traditionalisations of the regulation of daughters' lives may be co-determined by marginalisation, and acquire diverse meanings (Goodenow and Espin 1993; Mørck 2002; Yuval-Davis 1992). In host countries like Denmark men may experience discrimination as disempowering and emasculating. This may encourage (re)constructions of traditional(ised) gendered strategies of action (Yuval-Davis 1997: 67). Woman-blaming practices may be aspects of such strategies. Madiha said: *'When you are raised not to be out late at night or go clubbing… not to do this and not to do that, then of course it is the woman's fault* (that you experience sexualised coercion)… *The hardest thing was to think about telling my father. Fathers react very, very strongly'*. The risk of being blamed for events appears to be enhanced by (re)traditionalisations. Despite their very different relations to their families, both Zarah and Madiha referred to their experiences as potentially soiling family honour. Madiha explained: *'It is also hard for the family to go through all that…* (instead) *do something … the family can be*

proud of.' Such dilemmas may mistakenly be understood as static expressions of religions or traditions, instead of as answers to overarching aspects of contemporary social relations or to relations between majority and minority (Baumann 1999). Besides, in diverse family contexts, young majority women like Anna also kept silent about the events. They were equally worried about feelings and actions of family members, sometimes especially about those of fathers and brothers.

All the same the young minority women seemed especially concerned about perspectives of families and communities, including the sanctions or rejections of potential future husbands. Minority boys and men were ascribed stances similar to those of the parental generation. So concerning their possibilities of marrying someone from 'their' ethnic communities, public knowledge of their 'loss of virginity' became a real worry. This may make the women refrain from reporting sexualised coercion to the police. Furthermore, Jasmin described how she was accosted in the street by men instructing her to behave in accordance with 'tradition'. It was also suggested that she marry the perpetrator, and she included it in her reflections on how she may again be fully recognised as a member of 'her' community. Most majority women made sharp distinctions between the meanings of self-initiated sexual relationships and sexualised coercion. To minority women this distinction did not seem so clear. Jasmin said:

> There it is again that thing, that you *(majority women)* don't have to be a virgin when you get married. But we do. If I was Danish, and had Danish parents, of course I would tell them *(about being subjected to coercion)*, but not when my parents are foreigners.

The creolisation of their lives seemed to contribute to complicate their relations to their parents and to others. They reflected on how to keep events secret, as they simultaneously wanted to participate in aspects of traditionalised life as well as in the multiethnic life of youths. Thus (re-)traditionalisation of perspectives on sexuality, with an emphasis on virginity, was described by minority informants as occasioning interconnected dilemmas. Zarah said: *'If they* (her parents) *said that there was nothing wrong with it, that it wasn't a problem with virginity, then of course you would tell them quietly and easily'*. She continued: *'I live alone. Of course it wasn't* (OK) *in the start. But I fought until the end, so now I have moved.'* She stated this as an argument against telling her parents about coercion, and added that physicians have to get permissions from parents when you are under 18 and in need of an abortion. Since both self-initiated sexuality and experiences of coercion were associated with restrictions of (re)traditionalisation, some minority women experienced particular ambivalences in attempts at developing connected aspects of their agency.

Jessica's mother was from the Far East and a practicing Catholic. For support Jessica turned to her father and her sister-in-law, who both came from the ethnic majority. Discussing her reasons for not wanting to talk with her mother about her problems she, like Jasmin, explained that she considered her mother to be too 'old fashioned'. The conflicts and ambivalences the young women experienced were evidently mediated through their participation in contradictory practices of diverse and interconnected majority and minority contexts. Keeping secrets and working out who to tell and what to tell them became a constant necessity. In their trajectories across contexts, they had grown critical of (re)traditionalisations of women's sexuality and thus risked conflicts with, and exclusion from, facets of their life in minority communities. It meant risking deprivation of possibilities of participating in constitutive parts of their current life. In the aftermaths of sexualised coercion, social isolation and marginalisation was an issue for all informants (Salkvist 2006). But for minority women 'belonging' to minority communities it seemed to accentuate the risk of isolation.

Modifying the conduct of minority lives

Linked to participation in diverse contexts over time and place, personal stances and strategies of action are intentionally and continuously re-flected on and transformed (Dreier 2008). Regarding gender, the conduct of life of the minority women seemed specifically conflict-ridden. Perhaps therefore gendered and generational modifications of stances seemed most conspicuous in their accounts. Speaking about relations to a possible future daughter Zarah said: *'... I'd rather that she'd come and tell me* (about being subjected to sexualised coercion)'. Jasmin argued: *'But that is double standards. You want your daughter to come and tell you, but you won't tell your own parents'*. Zarah replied: *'Yes, I know, but that's because our parents are much more eh… a little more old fashioned'*. Jasmin wanted to protect her parents from knowledge that she expected they did not to want. Experiencing their own stances as far more negotiable (Giddens 1991; Søndergaard 1996), Jasmin's and Zarah's exchange referred to conflicts with (re)traditionalised ones as necessitating specific strategies. Zarah emphasised it saying: *'I wouldn't tell my parents… Perhaps later on I'll tell my siblings'*. Evocative of majority women, when in need of support concerning gendered and sexualised experiences, they regularly turned to girlfriends.

Nonetheless, summing up a discussion about disclosing events of sexualised coercion, Leyla stated: *'I think it is more sort of personal… how you*

want it yourself... how you judge it'. Acquiescing in this description of their choices as being personal, the young women were actively modifying and creolising aspects of their stances so as to resemble individualising 'majority discourses'. These young women, wanting more self-determination than they experienced was possible in parts of the minorities, developed kaleidoscopic ways of conducting their lives. Accordingly conflicts and modifications were more clearly voiced by them than by majority women. Despite of this, reflections on and modifications of perspectives and stances were central for all participants. In its aftermaths, subjection to sexualised coercion made each one of them re-evaluate and/or modify her perspective on the gendered conduct of daily life (Pedersen 2008b).

Concluding remarks

The conduct of lives of the minority informants constituted rather advanced and sophisticated forms of creolisation. It is difficult to determine how accounts and analyses would have evolved if women with more (re)traditionalised conduct of lives had participated. Furthermore, the informants do not speak for all young women who have been subjected to sexualised coercion (Pedersen 2003). Meanwhile, the issues they deal with are not just individual psychological issues. Although they may present themselves in different ways and be attributed diverse personal meanings, they are issues of daily life that many women have to deal with. They are issues embedded in societal praxis.

The article examines the meanings of issues connected to ethnified minorities and majority. Ethnification of daily life intersects with gendering and (re)traditionalisation as well as with individualisation. The impression of ethnic differences in their interwowen personal meanings is boosted by analytical categorisations into majority and minorities. It is also strengthened by the explicitness of ethnicity in accounts by minority participants versus its implicitness in accounts by majority participants. These dynamics are linked to the current Danish discursive over-determination of gender-trouble in the lives of minority women, and to its corresponding under-determination in the lives of majority women. Masking aspects of diverse gendered relations of power inherent in practices of sexualised coercion, both over- and under-determination may be understood as symbolic violence (Pedersen 2009; Bourdieu 1998). In countries in which women have obtained legislative equality this form of violence may even be basic to practices of gendered inequality (Krais 1993).

With an analytical focus on personal meanings of ethnicities as well as on the social, intersecting and changing character of the conduct of lives, some issues stand out. In this study, diverse forms of symbolic violence were seen to inhibit young women's efforts at dealing with central issues concerning the meanings of the aftermaths of sexualised coercion. Minority women did not conceive their problems to be similar to those of majority women, nor linked to issues common to *young* women in general. They formulated them within a gendered discourse of 'them and us', and consequently over-generalised minority women as having essentially different problems. In contrast, majority women rarely voiced sexualised coercion as forms of violence against *women*. In a Danish context, linking sexualised coercion to gender may appear to be a negation of the proclaimed gender equality, and may have seemed unfounded. Thus, when subjected to individualising and woman-blaming discourses, they did not recognise them as such. Consequently, both minority and majority women had difficulties unravelling the complex agency-related intersecting meanings of ethnicities, gender and sexualised coercion. Yet they did not seem to feel guilt as often and automatically as trauma-literature may lead us to expect. Rather their feelings and reflections were concretely linked to social and gendered ascriptions of meanings. As minority as well as majority women are released from tradition-orientated regulations of sexuality and other aspects of their lives, they are ascriptions that are undergoing change.

Living the lives of young women had consequences for agency in general, and for relations to families in particular. Some were more secretive about the events of coercion than others. Some, especially some minority women were more experienced in leading secret lives. Meanwhile, some experienced specific dilemmas relating to their parents and other members of the ethnic communities. Expectations regarding virginity restricted them in confiding in, and getting support from parents. Public knowledge of the events entailed specific risks of exclusion. Generally, the more constrained and contradictory the lives of the young women were, the more they were troubled in their struggles to (re)gain agency. At times creolisation of their conduct of lives contributed to this. Other major struggles were, however, apparent in the lives of some majority women. Besides, as supported by the study on which this article draws, the events of sexualised coercion as such did not determine the meanings ascribed to them (Pedersen 2008c). In their aftermaths, regardless of ethnicity, they were social and situated, hereby contributing to their diverse and changing meanings. Ascribed meanings were connected across diverse contexts of the informants' pasts, presents and envisaged futures, each informant having her own unique and personal trajectory. Thus, the study as a whole suggests that research should focus more

on the contextualisation and re-contextualisation of the personal meanings of the aftermaths of sexualised coercion.

Research must unmask the symbolic violence inherent in dualisations of universalist versus relativist approaches, in conceptualisations of majority versus minority, in practices individualising gendered violence, and in the gender blindness of certain versions of multiculturalism. They should be replaced by approaches that encompass agency in its connectedness to the complex and intersecting social relations in which we conduct our lives. Wishing to avoid further victimisation of already victimised women, gender-informed transversalist research that includes first-person perspectives is necessary for prevention and support practices.

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